

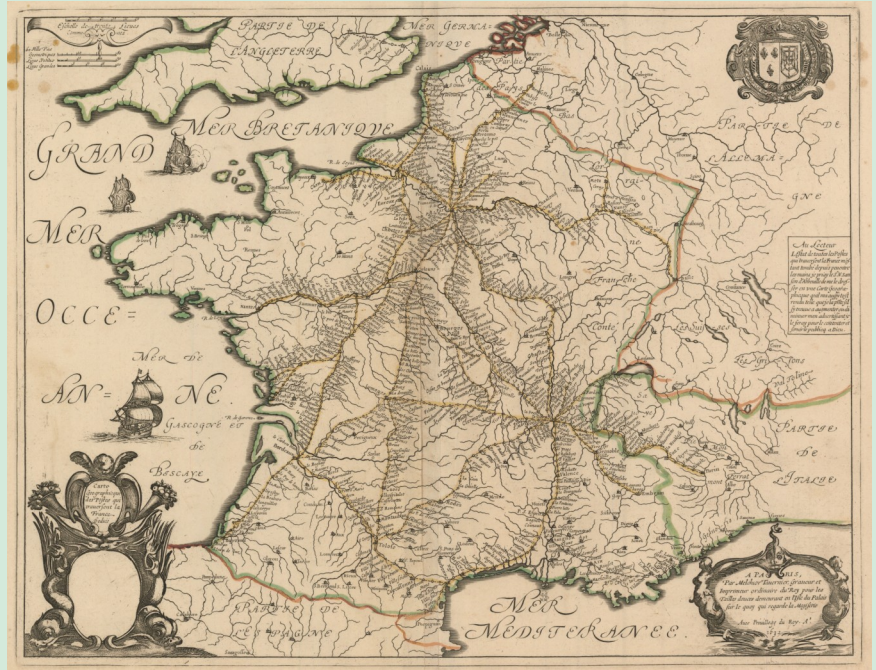
AUTUMN 2014
FRENCH 376 (SLN 14807)

**Culture, Politics and Society in France from the
Religious Wars to the Revolution**
(5 credits; I&S/VLPA; conducted in English; no prerequisite)

Prof. Geoffrey Turnovsky
TTh 1:30-3:20pm, SMI 304

By the 1680s, under Louis XIV, France had become the foremost military superpower in Europe. The global influence of its culture continued into the 1700s, “when all of Europe spoke French.” But while international elites from Saint Petersburg to Lima adopted French as a prestige language, most people in France, even on the cusp of the 1789 Revolution, spoke it only as a second tongue, if they spoke it at all.

The staging of French grandeur at Versailles or on battlefields throughout Europe masked the degree to which France was—and still is—a diverse and fragmentary collage of regional communities and provincial traditions. The king’s 20 million “subjects” remained deeply wedded to local customs, affiliations, and dialects. They had limited contact with the central government (mostly via the tax collector or judge) and little affection for it. How could a modern, unified *nation*, with a national culture and language, take shape out of this patchwork?



Map of French postal routes, 1632

We’ll address this question in French 376, emphasizing the following topics:

- Emerging ideals of “French” culture, language, and “national” identity forged through conflict and compromise with older, regional traditions, dialects, and cultures
- The challenge posed to ancient social hierarchies by new realities: urbanization, professional and geographic mobility, new consumption patterns fueled by global trade and colonialism, new attitudes towards gender, marriage and domestic life
- Religious communities and conflicts in a Catholic monarchy with a large Protestant minority
- Rising literacy rates and the importance of new media environments (represented by the periodical press or the theatre) both to unifying a scattered population under the abstract banner of “France” and, by providing a forum for “Enlightened” debate, to political participation, criticism of the state, and the affirmation of individual freedom and rights